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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [YI](#) [UNMIK](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO PRESIDENT SEJDIU CONTINUES MINORITY
OUTREACH AT DECANI MONASTERY

REF: PRISTINA 285

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. On the first ever visit by a Kosovo President to Decani Monastery, President Fatmir Sejdiu toured the grounds and church on Orthodox Easter Sunday, and then discussed the protection of Kosovo's Serbian Orthodox heritage sites with Bishop Teodosije in Serbian. Other visitors included the SRSG, COMKFOR, Charg and other Serb, Albanian and international representatives. END SUMMARY.

SEJDIU AND TEODOSIJE DISCUSS CULTURAL HERITAGE

12. (SBU) On April 23 Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu visited Visoki Decani Monastery in western Kosovo to participate in Serbian Orthodox Easter celebrations. The 14th century monastery was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004, and remains the only UNESCO site in Kosovo. The legal status and protection of Orthodox sacred sites will be addressed as part of the ongoing Kosovo status negotiations. (NOTE. During his mid-April visit to Kosovo, Ambassador Frank Wisner, the Secretary's Special Representative for Kosovo Final Status Talks, specifically suggested to Teodosije that he invite President Sejdiu to Decani for Orthodox Easter. END NOTE.).

13. (SBU) After touring the monastery's church, Sejdiu participated in a reception hosted by Bishop Teodosije Sibalic of Lipljan and Father Sava Janjic. Other participants included SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen, COMKFOR Giuseppe Vallotto, Sejdiu's advisor Skender Hyseni, mayor of Decan municipality Nazmi Selmanaj, Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM) leaders Oliver Ivanovic and Randjel Nojkic, representatives from the German, Russian and Italian liaison offices, as well as Charg, PolOff and PolFSN. During the meeting President Sejdiu and Bishop Teodosije discussed (in Serbian) the importance of protecting Kosovo's cultural heritage, and agreed that the monastery is an important part of that heritage. Teodosije thanked KFOR and Selmanaj for

their assistance in protecting the monastery.

¶4. (SBU) Teodosije praised the preliminary work of the Reconstruction Implementation Commission (RIC) for Orthodox Religious Sites, and urged faster action on further reconstruction of sacred sites damaged in March 2004 riots. He presented Sejdiu with a Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) report entitled "Crucified Kosovo," detailing church destruction in Kosovo since the arrival of NATO troops in ¶1999. The report includes pictures showing churches before and after they were damaged. (NOTE. According to the RIC, the first phase of debris clearing from 30 Orthodox sites damaged in March 2004 was completed in December 2005. The RIC was established per a memorandum of understanding signed between the PISG and the Serbian Orthodox Church in March ¶2005. END NOTE.) Teodosije also gave Sejdiu a book of photographs chronicling monastic life at Decani, entitled "Keepers of the Shrine."

VISITORS TOAST TO PEACE, GOODWILL AND RECONCILIATION

¶5. (SBU) After delivering messages of peace, goodwill and reconciliation over toasts of rakiya (plum brandy) home-brewed by the Decani monks, Sejdiu and the others signed the monastery's guest book. Afterwards the monks distributed red-dyed, hard-boiled traditional Serbian Orthodox Easter eggs to the guests, who, in accordance with Serbian tradition, proceeded to crack them against one another's eggs to see whose was the "strongest." The reception was followed by a banquet attended by Returns Minister Slavisa Petkovic, along with other international and local guests, including KFOR soldiers.

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¶6. (SBU) During the reception, Ivanovic told PolOff that the SLKM intends to return to the Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG). He has been saying the same thing publicly and privately for months, but this time added that their current strategy is to return immediately prior to the SRSG's report to the UN on standards implementation, due on May 30. He said he didn't want to return too soon, thereby giving the SRSG "too much credit" for their return. In a press statement after the event, Ivanovic praised Sejdiu's visit to the monastery, saying that "actions speak more than words."

¶7. (SBU) On the road to the monastery, both tri-lingual (Albanian, Serbian and English) road signs for the monastery were in place on Easter Sunday. Bishop Teodosije and Father Sava have complained for months that the signs are often vandalized and removed. Teodosije also complained to the COM in early April about a large red banner for the Albanian nationalist party Balli Kombetar, which remained clearly visible on the road to the monastery on Easter.

SEJDIU'S ONGOING EFFORT TO REACH OUT TO MINORITIES

¶8. (SBU) Sejdiu's visit to Decani Monastery is part of his ongoing campaign to reach out to Kosovo's Serbs and other minority communities, which has met with a mixed response from Kosovo Serbs. In March he had productive meetings with minorities in Dragas/Drage and Orahovac/Rahovec municipalities (reftel). However, local residents and members of the municipal assembly boycotted his April 20 town hall meeting in the Serb-majority municipality of Strpce in southern Kosovo. Strpce mayor Stanko Jakovljevic attended the beginning of the meeting, but then left after announcing he was going to try to convince members of the municipal assembly to participate. He never returned. Sejdiu has made several press statements saying he will continue to visit minority communities.

¶9. (SBU) In recent days, billboards have gone up around

Kosovo sponsored by the ministry of culture urging citizens in Albanian, Serbian and English to protect Kosovo's cultural heritage, saying "Protect it - It's Yours!" The billboards show photographs of Kosovo's main cultural heritage sites and objects, including Gracanica and Decani monasteries, alongside the mosques and bridges of Prizren, and the 16th century bridge in Vushtri/Vucitern.

CEKU'S OVERTURE REBUFFED BY BISHOP ARTEMIJE

¶10. (SBU) While Sejdiu's request to visit Decani was embraced by the moderate Teodosije, Prime Minister Ceku's request to visit Gracanica monastery on Orthodox Easter was denied by hard-line Bishop Artemije, Head of the Raska and Prizren diocese. Artemije led Easter services at Gracanica, and there was a constant trickle of visitors to the monastery throughout the day. In an April 19 letter to the office of prime minister, Artemije said he was not in a position to accept such a request until he and other internally displaced Serbs can return to their residences. Artemije has lived in Gracanica since 1999 due to security concerns-- his official Episcopal residence in Prizren municipality was burned during the March 2004 riots. (NOTE. Kosovo media reported that Ceku instead participated in ceremonies to donate two tractors to two Serb villages in Peja/Pec municipality. END NOTE.)

TEODISJE PLANS FURTHER OUTREACH

¶11. (SBU) Bishop Teodosije and Father Sava have long talked of a need for greater interaction and confidence-building between Serb and Albanian communities in Kosovo. On several occasions Teodosije has expressed a hope to the COM that the

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new Kosovo government will do more to reach out to Kosovo Serbs and show them there is a place for them in Kosovo. He and the COM also discussed the possibility of organizing an outreach event at a public school in the town of Decan with the local mayor and citizens, as a way of starting to rebuild the positive relationship the monastery had with the local Albanian community before the war. The COM agreed to participate in the event, to be held sometime after Easter.

¶12. (SBU) Decani Monastery representatives are also organizing an interfaith conference, to be held at the Pec Patriarchate on May 2-3. Father Sava told PolFSN on April 25 that invitees will include religious and international representatives, Kosovo and Serbian ministry representatives who work on the protection of cultural heritage, and the mayors of Pec/Peja and Decan municipalities.

MONASTERY PROTECTION ZONE RENEWED

¶13. (SBU) UNMIK announced on April 26 that the SRSG has signed an executive order extending the Special Zoning Area (SZA) around Decani Monastery for an unspecified period. The SZA was established by executive order on April 25, 2005. The original order banned construction, commercial activity, and natural resource exploitation on 800 hectares of public and private lands in the Bistrica River Canyon near the monastery for a six-month renewable period; and was renewed in October 2005. In an April 26, 2006 press release the SRSG underlined that the SZA "does not affect private ownership rights but makes clear to potential investors, owners and users of all land in the area must follow Kosovo laws and UNESCO and other international standards for the preservation of cultural and natural heritage."

¶14. (SBU) On April 24 the media reported that Vetevendosja ("Self determination") activists dumped a wagon-load of hay in front of the UNMIK headquarters in Pristina, claiming that, due to the restrictions in the special zoning area,

property owners there cannot make full commercial use of their lands, and are only allowed to mow grass. In the preceding weeks there were several small demonstrations in the town of Decan against the renewal of the zone. However, Luis Perez-Segnini, UNMIK's representative in Decan municipality, told PolFSN that leaders of the demonstrators, including Vetevendosja founder Albin Kurti, had each expressly called for demonstrators to take special care to avoid confrontation with the monastery's monks and to instead focus energies on UNMIK. (NOTE. Reacting to USOP concerns about the planned demonstrations, Kurti had promised E/P Chief during an April 10 meeting to make clear the monastery was not the target of their protest actions. END NOTE.).

LOCAL SERBS CELEBRATE DESPITE ONGOING UNCERTAINTY

¶15. (SBU) PolOff also participated in a private family gathering at the home of a Serb elementary school teacher in an enclave outside Gračanica. Relatives who were displaced to Serbia during the conflict, including a grandmother suffering from cancer now living in Vojvodina and cousins living in Smederevo in central Serbia, had returned to celebrate Orthodox Easter with their family. The teacher told PolOff she was especially concerned about recent reports in the media that UNHCR is developing contingency plans in case large numbers of Kosovo Serbs (up to 40,000 according to press reports) decide to leave Kosovo in the case of independence.

¶16. (SBU) She said she does not want to leave Kosovo, because she and her husband (a professor at the university in north Mitrovica) have good jobs here. (NOTE. She was not affected by the recent directive from the Kosovo Coordination Center forcing Kosovo Serb teachers to choose between Pristina and

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Belgrade salaries, because, as a part-time teacher, she only receives a salary from Belgrade. END NOTE). However, she said they waiting to see what will happen. She said Kosovo Serbs are unwilling to make any investments or improvements, even something so simple as "painting a wall," for fear that it will be a lost effort if they leave Kosovo in the coming months. She herself has an empty apartment standing ready in Belgrade, purchased with assistance from relatives living in western Europe.

¶17. (SBU) COMMENT. President Sejdiu's visit to Decani Monastery on Orthodox Easter was a success, and very well received. It is exactly the type of concrete, high-level outreach that builds confidence and sets an example for Kosovo citizens that interactions with minority communities can be positive and constructive. The billboards are further evidence the Kosovo government is taking its obligation to protect Kosovo's cultural heritage seriously. Now the challenge is to convince the citizens of Kosovo to do the same, and to incorporate functional mechanisms for lasting legal protections into the final status agreements, with special provisions for Orthodox sites. END COMMENT.

¶18. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG